

PROTEUS
THE FUTURE
OF INTELLIGENCE

VERNON LEE

PROTEUS
OR
THE FUTURE OF INTELLIGENCE

TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW

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this Series will be found
at the end of this volume*

PROTEUS

OR

THE FUTURE OF INTELLIGENCE

BY

VERNON LEE, LITT.D.

Author of *Vital Lies*, *Satan the Waster*,
The Handling of Words, etc.

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To my dear friend
BELLA DUFFY
with thanks for a lifetime
of intelligent talk.

1880-1925

I

INTELLIGENCE AND PROTEUS

THERE seems not to exist a word—for words are old while meanings may be new—which answers exactly to what I shall speak of as *Intelligence*. But space being short for what has to be said, I will not waste any in preliminary definitions. That which I mean by Intelligence will become evident by what I expect from its presence and attribute to its absence. I start from the assumption that it already exists, however insufficiently; and I deduce from what it has done that its nature is to intensify and extend. Whether this will be witnessed in the near future, or whether it may be checked by adverse circumstances, is no concern of mine. Writers of this series, and

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several others besides, have enlarged on the political and economic contingencies to which Intelligence, or persons presumed to have it, seem likely to be exposed. Whether Intelligence may become the weapon of a dominant caste, as was the hope of Comte, of Renan, and, at one moment, of Mr. H. G. Wells; or whether, as proposed by M. Charles Maurras, Intelligence shall be honoured with a subordinate function in some sort of Fascist State, I am inadequate to judge. Nor do I even feel certain that history has shown, or economic theory demonstrated, that Intelligence can be bullied or starved out of existence. Meanwhile let me confess that what I have to say about the Future of Intelligence is the expression as much of my hopes as of my convictions, both, however, arising from a longish experience of changes already brought about, and changes beginning to be brought about, by the particular, and perhaps rather modern, something I mean by

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Intelligence. What *I* mean, and what, under restriction to that meaning, appears *to me* likely or desirable. By underlining these personal pronouns, I am able to forestall the mention of one great change which Intelligence is already initiating, namely, the recognition and avowal that what one thinks (as distinguished from what primers, manuals and other authorities have taught one to believe) is—well, *just what one does think*, and neither the consensus of human opinion nor the revelation of the Deity's irrefragable truth.

Returning to the word *Intelligence*, the meaning I attach to it will become sooner obvious by clearing away some misconceptions thereof which may occur to my reader. And first: The Intelligence whose future interests me is not the same thing as the *Intelligentsia*. Those of us who belong to that class presumably possess *Intelligence*, since we live, or try to live, by its exercise. But it is no monopoly of ours, nor do

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we always employ it in the manner which answers to my meaning. For living on or by its employment may, as is often seen among men of science and philosophers, result in their capital of natural Intelligence being sunk in a few enterprises of especial value, leaving them, as in the notorious case of Dr. Faust, but a scanty balance for current use and pleasure. I have brought in the word *pleasure* because the pleasantness of its varied exercise is one of the chief characteristics of what I mean by *Intelligence*, fostering that nimbleness, elasticity, hence also pervasiveness, which makes it a chief factor of human progress, as well as one of progressive mankind's indisputable marks and unalienable rewards. Now these same pleasant properties, so often sacrificed by very studious persons, turn Intelligence into the stock-in-trade (eked out with plentiful surrogates) of that other branch of the *Intelligentsia*, those who make a livelihood by living down to their readers,

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relieving their boredom, lapping their thick skins in sentimentality, and keeping up the sooty flame of their collective passions ; for alas, the Man of Letters is tempted to serve his public not merely as an unconsidered jester but as a respected moral guide.

Thus it comes about that we of the *Intelligentsia* cannot stand as faultless specimens of Intelligence. Besides, our facility for self-expression and our habit of holding forth unchecked combine to exaggerate, stereotype and warp our best ideas : only think of Carlyle and Ruskin, let alone Tolstoy and Nietzsche !

Having so far established what I do *not* mean by Intelligence, and before entering on discussion of Intelligence's future achievements, it seems fitting to say a word or two about Proteus, to whom this little treatise is consecrated. It is so, I confess, partly because I am attracted by the classical titles, *Dædalus*, *Icarus*, *Tantalus*, of my predecessors, and then because, as

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described by Virgil, Proteus is to me one of the most engaging figures of mythology: . . . " Ille, sua contra non immemor artis, omnia transformat sese in miracula rerum, ignemque, horribilem feram, fluviumque liquentem . . . "

But here again I must forestall another wrong identification likely to jump into the reader's mind: to wit, of Proteus with Intelligence. On the contrary: Proteus, multiform and ever-elusive, represents that which Intelligence (lighter equipped than specialized Intellect for such rapid hunts) can sometimes catch sight of and, for however brief a contact, sometimes even clutch. Proteus, in my mythology, is the mysterious whole which we know must exist, but know not how to descry: Reality. For, whatever else we may believe it to be, Reality when thus partially revealed, is never twice the same. Nor merely because of what we call waxing and waning, growth and decay, and whatever other

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phases of individual and racial transformation biology has made us superficially familiar with. There may well be some *πάντα ρέι* outside and irrespective of our thoughts; indeed, it may have been in miming the universal flux that our thoughts themselves have grown *protean*. Look, for instance, at that strange (well named *auxiliary*) verb whereby we testify belief in reality, *esse, to be*; which holds in its emptiness the possibility of all qualities and happenings and implies in its assertion of mere blank existence the assurance of continual change: a future and past. For, whenever we speak of what we call a *thing*, its mere name, like the name of Virgil's Proteus, is a spell making us witness aspect after aspect, take stock of relation after relation, admit likelihood after likelihood. And our belief in that thing's reality, in its being *that thing* and no other, means that it has had a certain, however unknown, past, and will have a more or less certain future.

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In this sense *Reality*, the fact of aspects perceived, remembered and expected in regularly connected sequences and combinations, *that* is what I mean by Proteus. Maybe that Proteus does not change at all except in our narrow, and shifting, field of vision. Maybe that the multiform Virgilian Proteus might turn out to undergo but one first and last transformation, into that great auxiliary *esse, to be*, holding in its stark emptiness all that, for us, is things and happenings. . . . Such a transcendent and sole real Reality I leave to metaphysicians, not without wondering secretly whence, save from occasional experience of this (to them) unreal Proteus, they ever got to think about Reality at all.

So, dealing in this shallow treatise solely with such (even if spurious) Reality as Proteus represents, I need now only justify my outrageous claim that mere Intelligence can have any privileged intercourse therewith. My ground for saying so is that specialized

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intellect screws its marvellous lenses down on only a single, and *singled out*, aspect of Reality ; employs subtle reagents revealing only the properties for which they have been devised. Moreover, that the world of regular, foretellable sequences which science constructs is a map teaching us why to turn to the right or the left, but not a moving slice of the landscape we are moving in. Instead of which mere Intelligence, with its rule-of-thumb logic and wellnigh automatic movements, may be fairly fitted, not indeed to inventory and schedule separate items of Proteus' multifold embodiments, but to keep us aware that Proteus is there at that eternal game of his : changing his aspects perpetually, whether you watch him or not, nay, changing aspect by the very fact of your watching him.

This may suggest that Intelligence is never at rest ; and no more it is. But its movements being responsive to what strikes it from outside, are, just as the

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outside's own ways, orderly, and such as organize themselves into regular rhythms of sameness and diversity. For Proteus is absolutely unexpected only to persons like Virgil's Aristæus who, you must remember, was so hide-bound in his business of *honey-making* (alter one letter, you won't alter my meaning !) as to be wholly unaware that his own caddish behaviour had occasioned the death of Eurydice and so remarkable an event as the Descent of Orpheus into Hell. Practical people like that are nearly always astonished and dismayed when confronted with Proteus ; "they had forgotten . . ." Now Intelligence is as much memory as perception ; and for it there is always in the transformations it is watching something familiar which carries it back to what it has already witnessed, and forwards, expectantly, to something it may be going to witness. Hence to Intelligence there is never mere repetition, just as there is never utter novelty. And its frequent doubts are

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always conditioned by its habitual beliefs. That explains why Intelligence is so chock-full of prejudices, as all those are aware who have ever asked it to accept miracles and ghosts on their testimony or on someone else's authority. Such people exclaim at the sceptic's blindness to evidence, because they do not know that doubting and even denying are part of Intelligence's active rhythm of grasping and acquiescing; a process of assimilation and elimination in which the already experienced and accepted selects that which shall be accepted or rejected. Moreover, such selective action often expresses itself in the most impertinent (because most pertinent) queries, as: "Now how would you explain that?" "In what sense are you using that word?" etc., etc., etc. Queries, all of them, which in their exasperating amateurishness have probably done more than the elaborate arguments of specialized Intellect to shoo away some of the many Chimæras, Entities, and Essences,

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which, as Rabelais already remarked, had gone on *bombinating in vacuo* through the resounding spaciousness of philosophy and science, leaving behind only the fainter buzz of *Historical and Economic Laws, Entelechies, Teleologies* and *Vital Elans*. It was, I take it, Intelligence which first scoffed in Molière's play at opium's *Virtus Dormitiva*. . . .

At this point a parenthesis must be opened on account of a reader asking, not impertinently, whether what I have been talking of under the name of Intelligence is not plain *Common Sense*. Yes ; but also No. Since, on behalf of practicality, Common Sense usually warns us off from just such questions as Intelligence should deal with. So one might say that Intelligence is a kind of Common Sense, but applied to uncommon (not common or garden !) subjects, and as yet, alas, only by rather uncommon people.

If Proteus be taken to represent that Reality which all save metaphysicians

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believe to be real, he represents especially that half of it which I have (elsewhere) called *Otherness*, that is to say, whatever is not *ourselves*. And just as the essential, unshareable *ourselves* is what we feel, to wit: moods, passions, efforts, hope and fear, liking and disliking; so the *not-ourselves* (other persons as well as other things, and even our own personalities when viewed as if they were not our own)—the *Otherness* in short, is, on the contrary, *seen*, because it is outside us. Seen by the mental eye of Intelligence, which, like the bodily one, moves in every direction and focuses to all distances, thereby informing us of the proportions and relations of whatever is not *ourselves*, and following step by step the actions which are not our own. And though it must borrow the lenses of Science (which centuries of thinkers cut and polished) before it can know things in their microscopic detail or their astronomical remoteness, yet with no aid save everyday experience, Intelligence

suffices to teach us the most important and most overlooked fact concerning that Reality which is *Otherness* : namely, that it has ways of its own and does not exist merely to suit our likings.

The habit of taking “otherness” into account, and a wider and wider circle thereof, might serve as a rough test of Intelligence and of its progress : young children, as is notorious, referring everything to themselves ; and “uneducated” people, from the narrowness of their knowledge, rarely conceiving anything beyond their own personal experience. At the risk of incurring the same criticism, I hazard my own impression that the dominance of possessive pronouns, the restriction of interest to one’s own history and circle of acquaintances, has become less usual among “educated” persons.

Similarly, that there is getting to be something rather old-fashioned about settling general questions on the strength of single personal experiences. Except where strong likes and dislikes come

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into play, it is rarer than formerly to hear (shall we say?) divorce condemned because of the sad case of Mrs. Blank ; or the eight-hours day rejected on account of last harvest having been soaked ; or the practical utility of a classical education justified by the career of Mr. Gladstone. Modes of thought like this seem to be (slowly !) disappearing in the wake of the anecdote-mongering and epigram-and-joke button-holing of ancient bores who may have been brilliant conversationists at Meredithian dinner-tables. And when one thinks of it : was not such the substance of much of our grandparents' wit and wisdom ? Nay, a little further back did not "gentlemen" ask the ladies riddles after themselves exchanging smutty *Joe Millers* over their wine ? And behold ! there opens up a vista of euphuism, of pedantic discussions, of "sonnet, c'est un sonnet," of "deliciæ eruditorum," and "facetiæ"; boredom incalculable back through Hôtels de Rambouilletts and

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Medicean academies to Courts of Love and the stale scurrilities of Shakespearean clowns. . . . Nay, was not Shakespeare himself ready to adorn with supremest poetry and philosophy stories often preposterously cock-and-bull? Which makes one suspect that Intelligence, in the sense in which I have been using the word, is of amazingly recent growth; and that the people of the past, superior though they may have been in genius, wit, humour, and even wisdom, would have struck us (and we shall doubtless strike future generations) as decidedly stupid.

For instance (returning to Proteus!), in their capacity of *thinking in terms of change*. This seems an *intrinsic part of thinking in terms of otherness*; yet, as, a fact, it dates only from the days of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Gibbon and Condorcet. This last name brings home that until the eighteenth century the only Future which people thought about was the Future in Heaven or

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Hell. The importance of the latter alternative explains quite sufficiently why no interest was left over for any other after-life, to wit, that of unborn generations. Indeed, the sway of religious conceptions accounts also for our ancestors having been no less cut off from the Past and replacing it (as their painters dressed Abraham or Cæsar in Renaissance costume) by the Present. For all religion tends to think *sub specie æternitatis*, as of the god who is sacrificed afresh at every celebration, and who consecrates the routine of the seasons and the seasonal monotony of agriculture and pastoral life; whence no doubt, the persistence of the amazing fallacy *that there is nothing new under the sun*, with its corollary that there ought to be nothing not *old*. Whence also the double superstition (till Science broke in with something different !) of chewing and rechewing the cud of Scripture and the Classics. With, in turn, the practical results that Milton's Puritans modelled

themselves on Joshua and Gideon; and frilled and waistcoated French Revolutionaries postured as heroes of Plutarch. Why, at this very moment do we not see the rods and axes of antique hangmen figuring (nor merely in figurative manner !) as emblems of post-war Italy, itself identified (to the neglect of schools and irrigation works) with a particularly high and palmy Rome? Rome! to rule which squalid mediæval village Dante called on a *Cæsar* who was a *Kaiser* elected by German feudatories; Rome, which we may take as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the refusal to realize that Past is Past and Present is Present. Which is perhaps the only "Lesson of History"; and whose application would dissolve many mythical alloys of conflicting nations welded together by the passionate white-heat of a name: England, France, America, Christianity, and nowadays, I fear, also Socialism, nations, and creeds concerning which, when asked for our allegiance, we have need to inquire: In which of its

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phases, which of its characteristics and embodiments?

For Intelligence warns us that we are dealing with Proteus, with him of ceaseless change. Not with the eternal, immutable divinities to whom our forebears brought their sometimes quaint and lovely, but, quite as often, obscene and grisly oblations.

But while ignoring distinctions between Past and Present, even our nearer ancestors conducted much of their thinking in elaborate water-tight compartments; for they conceived of "Truth" as a battleship, continually exposed to the murderous broadsides of "Error." Of these hermetic partitions, say, between *Faith* and *Reason*, *Body* and *Soul*, or *Good* and *Evil*, Intelligence has already rammed in a number, without drowning us. *Error* itself has lost its capital E, being usually called *Mistake*. And, what is more important, we have begun to notice that it and *Truth* are not at all

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irreconcilable, but cradled originally together, and sometimes intermarrying, with mixed or alternating generations, as by Mendelian rules; but very rarely, either Truth or Error, affording us a pure breed.

These examples will have justified, I trust, my contention that Intelligence is specially fitted to deal with Change. Not to praise or blame it after mature deliberation, like solemn and sedentary Reason; still less to filter concrete realities into immutable, because purely abstract, entities, which is the business of scientific thought; but just to perceive change on its passage and in so far help us to make the best of its coming.

Need one add that Intelligence is far more liable to mistakes than either "Reason" or "Logic"? But its mistakes, though so much more numerous, are, methinks, less massively enthroned and less likely to block the way than theirs, for there is something self-satisfied and without appeal about

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“Reason” and “Logic”: does not the one issue “dictates” and the other enunciate “laws”? Whereas the mistakes which Intelligence commits to-day, it will, in its light-hearted way, correct to-morrow, being as little ashamed of revokes as its disconcerting friend Proteus is of transformations. Of course, Intelligence *is* rather irresponsible and, one might add, cannot help being so because it is essentially *responsive*. Like the human eye (to which I have compared it) Intelligence turns to whichever side the light comes from, adjusting itself, in discursive, often desultory fashion, to all manner of directions and distances, comparing and measuring with unabashed slovenliness, extracting the qualities which strike it and hastening on to connect them with something it was struck by before. Being thus rapidly responsive, Intelligence may often, I admit, seem *on the pounce*, and more so than politeness warrants. But it can also take its time, poise circling round and round,

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and reverse its movement, because it is never motionless and always able to readjust its balance.

Such do I see Intelligence in those who possess it ; such do I feel it, on some delightful occasions, in myself. Such also I frequently notice it failing to make itself agreeable to some kinds of persons. Those who take a just pride in Reason or Logic are often a little ruffled ; or else, as Wagner said of Mozart, they find Intelligence just a little *frivol*. But in the long run they recognize an ally ; and their conscious superiority makes them indulgent. Not so with people—I might have said Peoples—who happen to be indulging in the glorious unimpeded violence of collective passions, specially those which are magnanimous and cruel, as, for instance, in war time, when a conscientious objector may come off better than an intelligent one.

In like fashion Intelligence's passionate pleasure in dealing with *Otherness*

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and in looking out for Proteus, Intelligence's frequent indifference to *here* and *now*, disrespect to *self* and refusal to regard *means* as *ends*—all this renders it unpopular with those practical-minded men who are bent on personal advantage and on outstripping competitors in the great race to *Nowhere*. These acute persons are quite aware that Intelligence might make an invaluable slave, only you cannot keep its nose, with any regularity, to the grindstone. In default of such practical usefulness it may be worth hiring, as one buys a yacht or an old master, for a mark of wealth and being in the know. But let us have none of your *whys* and *wherefores*! Besides, the Rulers of Men have by this time mostly recognized that Intelligence is harder to deal with than any number of High Principles, for you cannot hope to bamboozle it into serving you unawares.

But Intelligence, though thus in some quarters deservedly unpopular is

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adored by all who have it; and that is the reason why, once it has got a footing in the world, it is bound to increase and multiply and eventually conquer its promised land.

II

PROTEUS AND ETHICS

I HAVE just come across a passage from Huxley's famous *Romanes Lecture*, read thirty years ago and long since forgotten ; and which has brought home to me all our elusive Proteus has been doing in the domain of ethics ; moreover the share of Intelligence in confirming those changes. Huxley is pointing out a fact which he finds disconcerting, namely, "that ethical nature, while born of cosmic nature, is necessarily at enmity with its parent." The allusion to the harmony reigning in Victorian families may make one smile, like some well-bred Du Maurier illustration. But how those words bring back what some of us are old enough to have suffered in days when

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Free Thought drew a terrifying line between religious dogmas and moral ones, clinging to these to steady itself after jettisoning the others! One's youthful deistic anguish (as cruel, perhaps, as any believer's sense of God's forsaking him) at discarding God for insufficient morality, was merely transferred to one's terms with Huxley's ogre Cosmos, devouring the moral instincts itself had begotten. Occupied as my studies then were with art-history, I can remember wrestling with the horrid inconsistency of the art of Michael Angelo and Rafael having arisen in a civilization described by Taine as partaking of the brothel and the cut-throat's den. And I remember the heavenly relief of hitting on the notion that, since such art is not born in a day, it must have been begotten and incubated during the Franciscan Age, immune from all Borgian infections. Of course, the generation immediately younger than mine was taught by Nietzsche that Michael

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Angelo's greatness was, on the contrary, due to presiding Renaissance villainy ; but that pseudo-Nietzschian generation is, in its turn, superannuated, and the cult of *immoralism* along with it. Not only because paradoxes do not bear repetition, but for another reason which that quotation from Huxley has made me realize. Namely, that we have left off thinking of art as either moral or immoral, simply because morality no longer holds the same place in our thoughts as, say, in those of Ruskin, George Eliot, or, as that quotation shows, even in those of Huxley. Not the same (if one may say so, *ubiquitous*) place ; a place more clearly defined, but only the more important, ever since Intelligence, ferreting about among *Golden Boughs*, *Religion of the Semites*, and similar books, has quietly stripped from our moral valuations that half-supernatural, half-æsthetic halo which is but the shrunken religious involucrum wherein they came into the world. The "problem of evil" has

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already become the problem not of its toleration by God, but of its diminution by Man. *That* is the great change we are still witnessing ; a change, I cannot but think, greater than any brought about by the material applications of science, and implying a deliverance from individual suffering not less than that we owe to Pasteur and to Lister.

Whether we notice it or not, Morality is already taking a new status, independent alike of an absentee (or absent) Deity, and of an indifferent Cosmos. But its new domain, narrow and self-governing, essentially *sui generis*, has sanctions and imperatives only the stronger for being man-made and man-regarding. And, one may add, only the more austere binding on the present that we shall recognize them as different from those of the Past and different, no doubt, from those into which the Future will transform them.

Thus we are already conceiving of punishment only as a mechanism, successful or not, for social defence.

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And we scarcely ever hear more than the last echo of those incentives to virtue and deterrents from vice of the *Sandford and Merton* type of my own childhood's copybooks. Still less of the Stoical, and (alas !) Platonic mendacities about remorse torturing evil-doers, and the unhappy life of Browning's *Instans Tyrannus* with his "Then *I* was afraid." Neither do we talk any longer of the virtuous glows which (failing the increase of flocks and herds !) used to reward the virtuous acts of the generation adorned by Butler's Mr. Pontifex. We are getting to think of our own virtues, supposing we have any, as conducive not to our own advantage but to that of other folk.

Consonantly with the psychologist's recognition that, of the two polar feelings determining human action, the (positive) attraction of pleasure is far less potent than the (negative) repulsion of pain, it seems as if our future ethics would emphasize not good actions but

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bad ones. That will be following up the rule-of-thumb wisdom of the Commandments, of which the surviving ones are all "*thou shalt not*"; the positive ones about loving God and honouring Father and Mother having become either difficult to enforce or optional. I am glad of that word *optional*, because it leads to the remark that Intelligence is surely abolishing that neutral territory whence "good actions" can issue at "good" people's good pleasure and as an expression of their goodness, but which no one has a right to insist upon; indeed, which they have a perfect right to withhold, since they are patted on the back for doing them, or have their hands kissed, as children were taught to kiss those of the "revered author of their being." I expect that before so very long Intelligence may bluntly suggest that if the action, whatever it happen to be, is *really good*, that must mean that it is *really needed*; and if it is really needed, your fellow men can claim it and oblige

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you to claim it from your unwilling self. And to dishonour that claim may become in their eyes (mirrored in your own), mean, disgraceful, dirty. In the language of contemporary youth, it will not be *decent*.¹ That substitution of the word *decency* for the word *virtue* gives, methinks, the clue to the future revaluation of our moral standards. It implies, as I have suggested, a more intelligent and, in some ways, more indulgent, morality; but a morality on the whole more austere, a stark notion of duty armed with the relentless imperative which nowadays makes us abashed at the revelation in ourself of physical cowardice or bodily dirtiness. A morality, I venture to add, eventually able to do without the adornments coming under the head of "Moral Beauty."

And, speaking of a future standard of "decency," there will necessarily come

¹ "No, we may not be as moral as they (*i.e.* the older generation) are, but we are fifty times decenter."—G. B. Stern, *Tents of Israel*, 1924; p. 244.

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sundry revaluations quite intolerable to our present morality. I will not speak (since far too much is nowadays being spoken concerning what, after all, is but a small part of conduct) about such revaluations of sexual morals as *Dædalus* prognosticates from transplantation of ovaries. *That*, and coming facilitations for changing one's sex, cannot, indeed, fail to modify family arrangements; although I have greater belief in the effects of future methods of producing and exchanging, not offspring, but other commodities, and the consequent alteration in our tenure and conception of property. Indissoluble marriage, which already strikes some of us as scarcely decent, will lose its practical utility once inheritance is more or less abolished, and the subsistence and education of children no longer a charge on parents. Nor is this all: a more restricted practice and therefore habitual notion of ownership may at some distant day educate men and women, parents and children,

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lovers and friends, nay, masters and disciples, to admit Proteus even into the impregnable stronghold and inviolable sanctuary of human selfishness called *Love*. The “marriage of true minds” may, like the other one, come to be supplemented by honourable divorce. Exclusive reciprocal attachment, surely of all spiritual essences the most delicate, if not most volatile, may cease to be regarded as an inalienable piece of property, guaranteed by honour more terrible than law ; and which, while all else (and ourselves most !) alters and shifts, cannot be altered and shifted without guilt of theft. There may come an end to the ideal of such fidelity as implies the claim of him or her once preferred to be preferred for ever ; the duty also of continuing to prefer once having begun. Like much of the morality of a more intelligent age, “decent” behaviour in matters of sentiment will be based less upon an *ought* than an *is*. And I can conceive

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that such a change may make love's tenure less insecure and less routinish and perfunctory. It will, at least, save one of the finest kinds of happiness (and the multiplying factor of many other ones) not indeed from the passing misery of change, but from the ignominy of claimed or accepted sacrifice, and the cruel pollution of jealousy, not between lovers only, but between all who love. And when there shall be applied to love the solemn saying "the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away" we may learn to temper our loss by the intenser gratitude for whatever, even if only for a time, has been ours.

As with fidelity in love, so also with "loyalty" to persons, even to causes and ideas. But such, too often degrading, loyalty will, I imagine, be more than compensated for by the condemnation of a new sin against the Holy Ghost, and by insistence on a minimum (at least !) of consistency in one's own ideas and a minimum of conformity between one's judgment of

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others and one's judgment of oneself : the mote in one's brother's eye awaking the suspicion of the beam in one's own.

At the same time (which is not our time !), and as Intelligence takes on a leading part in morals, there will come the indulgent recognition that such a "decency" as we may exact (or try to exact) from ourselves, cannot, any more than personal cleanliness in our own day, be exacted from all our neighbours. It may take a good many transformations of Proteus before the mote can always be removed from our brother's eye, even supposing the beam to have been taken away from our own. It is no easy matter to be always clean inside and out, especially when, like the little boy in Stevenson's rhyme, "your dear Papa is poor," poor in spirit, perchance one of a long line of moral paupers. Neither is "decency" always attainable where there has been no past charwoman to prepare your easy tidiness at expense of previous

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dirty hands. Still less when, as nowadays, wallowing in excess or in cruelty is the only excitement many people can get out of life. Hence it may be a long while yet before the bare decencies of the spirit, even if recognized for such, can lose the value of rarity and the status of virtues. For, let us remember that, the fouler mankind's surroundings and sores, the greater the need for incense and myrrh and even for the questionable odour of sanctity. Is not early Christianity's, say St. Paul's, insistence on chastity and mansuetude the expression of the otherwise inexpressible bestiality, cruelty, and vaingloriousness of decadent Rome? And what is the foolish Franciscan laudation of beggary save the measure of mediæval rapine and simony?

So, for the time being and the world as it may, alas! long continue, mankind will need something besides a taste for moral decency, to wit, an admiration for generous, nay, quixotic impulses and for tender sensibilities. These

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Intelligence, respectful towards the need for them, can neither create, nor, except by negative measures, even increase. But it can do something as necessary. Intelligence, and only Intelligence, can see to it that, even to-day, such rare and precious impulses and sensibilities be not diverted to evil results, wasted in barren self-sacrifice, or the fostering of hide-bound selfishness. Wasted, above all, in hecatombs to the Molochs of collective superstition, like the one which is only just over, and may begin again to-morrow.

III

PROTEUS AND AESTHETICS

“ IF there be any truth in these forecasts of what your fine Intelligence may bring about or justify in the domain of ethics, then ” (it’s a certain kind of reader interrupting), “ then may I never enter, nay, cast a glance into this detestable world of rationalized righteousness ! *Human* do you call it, because you have made it godless ? What is this Intelligence of yours worth if it fails to perceive that God exists because Man has need of Him ; and that the true mission of virtue, of truth, of heroism, is not to make the world more durable, but to satisfy our deepest human craving, that for greater harmony and loveliness, for deeper, steadier passion than otherwise life affords ? ”

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My answer is that such a craving will become stronger, or at least wider-spread, in proportion as mankind grows more intelligent, therefore less exhausted by struggling against adverse circumstances, inbred defects and inherited superstitions. In proportion, likewise, as it will have learned to value its own virtues as they can minister to man's prosperity and betterment. Nay, more: the time will come when we shall turn with disgust and wrath at their cultivation for any other purpose; and when pleasure in virtue and in heroism for its own sake may come to be accounted so much æsthetic dilettantism, questionable and well-nigh obsolete. For with the orientation of morals towards human usefulness, towards dutifulness conceived as decency, people will get to understand that what man craves for as consolation and enhancement, the passion deeper and steadier, the harmony more complete than real life furnishes, Man creates for himself in poetry and art, and in the things of

reality seen as poetry and art. In all this he has made himself a realm where truth is never betrayed, because in its sheer existence *true* and *false* become words without a meaning ; moreover, where the deepest and highest passions are satisfied without being misapplied or wasted, because satisfied by their mere expression. Art and whatever the poor word *Art* may stand for—is the man-made sanctuary of the legitimate, the innocent, the immaculately *decent*, because it is closed to the shifting *needs*, the partial truths, above all, the *mine* and *thine*, which trouble real life. This, in its way, is also a realm of *otherness*, inasmuch as it transcends the self with its *here* and its *now*. Yet an *otherness* not merely recognized by Intelligence, but made by the heart's desire out of the heart's own substance and in desire's own shape ; for of such are the forms of the painter and sculptor, no less than the counterfeit presentments of the poet. Above all, in the twin arts of

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architecture and of music do we already meet the clarified embodiment of the longing and clinging, the solemn appeasement and victorious stress and fulfilment of human passion. Here, in art's interludes of life, we can obtain what religious creeds lay open to the reproach of being false because they give it for true ; and what love seeks to make unchanging, only to taste the bitterness of change. So that many as have been and will be the successive responses to our æsthetic cravings, the manifold satisfactions thereof, embodying as they do the purified essence of our feelings and activities, will, in the endless shifting of our valuations, perhaps constitute the one region where we need not be watching for Proteus.

IV

PROTEUS AND INTELLECTUAL MANNERS

THOUGH many other causes will bring about such moral revaluations as I have mentioned, Intelligence will play its part in justifying them. But Intelligence will itself effectuate great changes, methinks, in the minor moral realm of intellectual manners. For instance, proscribing *perfunctoriness* ; making us ashamed, which we are not, of offering in the guise of opinion much which we know to be stop-gap and shoddy. The condemnation of *perfunctoriness* will lead to discarding heckler's tricks and dialectic pit-falls like that concerning the future status of the widow of seven successive husbands, where-with the Sadducees, though disbelieving in any after-life at all, tried to trip up

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Jesus. His answer: that there would be neither marrying nor giving in marriage, may stand as the typical silencer to many queries with which debaters embarrass each other without advancing a step in the inquiry. For instance: "then, what do you propose to do?" Well! we may be intelligent enough to know that in nine cases out of ten there *is* nothing to propose. Since the more habitually we get to regard the Future as resulting from the Present and the Present from the Past, the more often we must admit that we know too little of the hidden Past, and less of the fleeting Present, to make sure what new combinations, including reciprocal neutralizations, are preparing to arise. The oftener we have watched the Old Man Proteus, the less, perhaps, our cocksureness about his next metamorphosis. Or, take another question which intellectual good breeding will refrain from because Intelligence foresees no answer: "In that case, what will you put in its place?"

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It being, let us say, indissoluble marriage, exclusive private ownership, war (you remember William James was, shortly before 1914, looking out for a *surrogate!*) or even what used to be called *God*, but may now be thankful when philosophers (like Mr. Lloyd Morgan) allow it merely adjectival rank as "*Deity*." How do you know that *it*, whatever *it* is, *will leave a place*? Do we not daily see that, when things vanish, their place (place in the world, in our thoughts, and also, in our hearts!) are apt to vanish along with them and be forgotten? And among such things as may some day vanish and be forgotten there will, I trust, be the dialectic ju-jitsu which makes many pages even of Plato such dreary reading. Lacking, as the world then did, all discipline of experimental science, such acrobatics may have afforded an indispensable training to logical thought, and a preparation for that latest-comer of all intellectual habits: care for the exact sense in

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which a word is being employed. Apart, however, from this, controversy of this kind has but a personal value, adding nothing to knowledge, just as nothing is added to wealth when one gamester loses money to another: the personal value of downing an adversary and magnifying oneself by mere comparison, which may be reckoned in some distant Future an intellectual entertainment fit for cads.

Such are a few of the improvements one might foresee in our intellectual manners. Allied with these is one which appertains to our intellectual morals. In another book¹ I have written at some length against the survival of the lawyer's and politician's arts of *Persuasion*, and of the priestly arts of *Exhortation* and *Denunciation*, both sets of them intended to influence men to think, feel and act differently from how they would otherwise do, but in compliance with the persuasive person's wishes. Some day or other such attempts may be accounted

¹ *The Handling of Words.*

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impertinent where they fail, and dishonest where they succeed ; they and the sway of words should constitute a chapter of intellectual morals.

Returning to mere intellectual *manners*, I think intellectual prize fights, duels and *vendettas*, such as wasted half the life of the greatest intellects from Abélard to Samuel Butler, are a little going out of fashion, like the quarrels for precedence we read about in *Herbert of Cherbury* and such-like : they stop the traffic, make a noise and, after a minute, bore us ! Moreover, I fancy I see a reason why, let alone mere spectators of such frays, even those who might have been principals in them will refrain and call them ill-mannered. I mean that, as people grow more intelligent, or more people grow intelligent at all, we shall discover other opportunities for exercising intellectual energy and for obtaining the thrill and uplift of intellectual prowess. There will appear other adversaries to wrestle with and cir-

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cumvent: *Things, Reasons why*, the Universe's riddles; not any longer mere other people trying to make us write ourselves down asses as we try to make them. The finest sport in all the world is hunting Proteus. . . .

Nor will I let myself be heckled with the objection that joys like these are reserved for minds like yours and mine, dear reader, minds *Creative*. . . . As if books, pictures, policies, opinions, etc., etc., were created *ex nihilo*, obeying that august *fiat* which evolutional philosophy has filched from the old Creator of all things to bestow on every member of the Intelligentsia. No, no, the joys I speak of are unprofessional. And the chief creative joy is that of understanding and appreciating; say the joy of every deserving reader outrunning the straight path of the writer in circles like those of a dog pleased to be taken a walk.

Amateurishness! I can hear those of you *pshah!* and *tosh!* who believe in training the (involuntary) attention

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and who value work less by results than by efforts. Amateurish? Why, of course, that's just the fun and the good of it. Also the unsought moral gain. For, are we not made more "decent" by these private, irresponsible dealings with the Unknown (at least to us); for instance, those secret inaccurate guesses at geological and historical riddles which make up half the pleasure of a journey? Since these amateurish stalkings of Proteus attain an attractiveness such that personal controversy seems insipid or odious by comparison.

I have had the good fortune once or twice, even in an old-fashioned lifetime, to witness the full flowering of such selfless intellectual happiness: to watch a mind so passionately interested in certain subjects as to care nothing whether the enchanting new ideas were its own or other folks'; nay, whether its own were by them confirmed or utterly demolished. I have seen that unusual spectacle, but once or twice

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only. For Intelligence has yet to establish its claim to such generous happiness. Once or twice only. But never more clearly have I seen it than in you, Mario Calderoni, dear dead young friend, who have embodied my hopes for the Intelligence of a distant Future, when you will not have received a posthumous recognition and I may be entirely forgotten.

V

USES AND ABUSES

CONSIDERING the great pleasantness, let alone the various uses, of the mental habits I have summed up as *Intelligence*, it is surprising there should not yet be more of it forthcoming. It has, at present, a way of giving out suddenly in individuals and nations, just when its mixture of light-hearted scepticism and steady hopefulness would seem most needed. By which inadequacy of its supply I am confirmed in the suspicion that Intelligence is a much more recent human accomplishment than the Past's other achievements in art and poetry and wit and humour would lead us to expect. Indeed, the deserved prestige of that Past, and the consequent survival of

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its educational and religious traditions and institutions, is very likely what has so strangely delayed the advent of modern Intelligence. And it is their dwindling, itself partly attributable to nascent Intelligence, which has delivered our intellectual activities from sundry blind alleys and sloughs of despond, like those presided over by the terrible, and most unintelligent, word *Salvation*. For Intelligence, one of whose virtues is abolishing Fear, is itself stifled by the obsession of danger in this world or the next : are we not seeing the most naturally intelligent of all countries fallen into incredible self-defeating stupidity through its present mania for "Security"? It is, of course, evident that, apart from the decay of religious and classical superstition, the growth of Intelligence in our own days has been enormously fostered by increase both of scientific knowledge and of civic liberty, and also, as far as it goes, of well-being ; also of opportunities for variety of impression at

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least for the well-to-do classes. And one hopes there may be other kinds of yet unforeseen novelties coming to Intelligence's assistance in the Future. Yet, the chief obstacles once removed, my hope is chiefly in what one might call Intelligence's own natural proliferation. One intelligent mode of thought inevitably leads to another, and puts out of action an unintelligent one. Every intelligent book adds, let us hope, to the intelligence of at least one reader ; so that we could almost do without the tremendous launchings-forth of the great challengers, Ruskin, Tolstoi, Ibsen, Nietzsche ; even of the more purely beneficent (because lighter-hearted) stirrers-up of thought like Bernard Shaw.

Believing, therefore, in such spontaneous multiplication of Intelligence, I do not find much use for the methods, whereof that one is but an extreme example which is attributed to the late Dr. Metchnikoff, proposing (it is said) to increase the output of genius by

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judicious doses of syphilitic virus. Surely, the supply of raw genius would be fairly adequate if only we could put it to the best use? And the best use of genius is not, in my opinion, the practical application of science to methods of reciprocal slaughter and devastation. Nor even its application to easier locomotion, intercourse and the cheapening of food, heat and light, except to the extent which would secure more health, more leisure and more opportunity all round; certainly at present not the case. And, speaking for myself, the best use of genius and the most necessary application of science, seems to be teaching people what Descartes called (whatever his precise meaning) the *méthode de bien conduire son esprit*; at least to the slight degree of not letting obsolete shibboleths and new-fangled catchwords carry us, as they did ten years ago, headlong into the disasters we were trying to avoid.

The next best thing to be done with

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our existing supply of genius might be to train it to check, by application of common sense and a little modesty, certain ailments inherent in its own constitution, namely: exaggeration, contrariness and, of course, megalomania. Such self-purification, one the part of persons of genius or what passes for such, would save the rest of us the disheartening task of throwing half of their sayings onto the scrap-heap, and of picking out of the scrap-heap some of the sayings of rival persons of genius consigned thereunto at their bidding. There is quite enough to be done in the way of selection, assimilation and elimination (since all understanding means that) without setting such Intelligence as we have to play scavenger to wasteful or slatternly genius. . . . And yet, and yet. . . . May not those trashinesses of genius, and the scavenging entailed thereby, be that which secures to Intelligence its highest activities, and in so far fulfils one of Genius's chief missions? For, after

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all, Intelligence is the living, changing mass of unprofessional thought, the averaged, habitual thought of the majority of us. And is not the chief use of all such genius as is not set aside in science or in art, rather to make the rest of us think, than to furnish us with ready-made thoughts, however true or sublime ? Nay, I would hazard the supposition that it was because the men of the Past were presented with such a mass of ready-made thoughts, creeds, philosophies, and moral formulæ (think of *Deuteronomy!*) all given for perfect and definitively valid, that there did not appear till so late in the day just what I have called *Intelligence*, which alone could give that without which the greatest genius is solitary and barren : an audience, a reader, a mind able to carry on the thinking and, in so far, able to eliminate the deciduous, the rubbishy elements of the thought already offered to it.

The consideration of this loss which mankind may have suffered through the

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notion that thoughts must be accepted ready-made rather than transformed into one's own, and that, consequently, men must be set apart to do the thinking (as the priests once did the praying and sacrificing) for others ; this consideration is at the bottom of my present hatred of the idea (which I shared in my youth) that exceptionally gifted persons should consecrate themselves into a caste, ministers, maybe, of a new religion, chosen vessels for a new-fangled deity.

And since we are discussing the reciprocal uses of Genius and of mere Intelligence (Genius ever stimulating Intelligence, Intelligence ever keeping Genius within the bounds of sense and of decency), allow me to set my face against all those oligarchies of genius and virtue which every Utopian philosopher from Plato to Comte, from Renan to H. G. Wells, has wanted to foist on dull, driven Mankind. And let us take to heart the *reductio ad absurdum* of all such schemes in the

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latest and hugest joke of our one great laughing philosopher, when he shows us the world governed by bald, toothless and passionless sages, who, even without having reached the years of Methuselah, have long survived the age when every decent person should retire to his or her coffin.

And before leaving the subject of the services (sometimes scarcely desired) which Genius may need at the humble hands of Intelligence, let me point out how our men of genius or thereabouts ("Creative Intellects" is the official expression) have latterly taken over one of the most remunerative and mischievous employments of all obsolete priesthoods, to wit: of frightening believers with bogies of their manufacture. For, just as the Torments of Hell and the Pitfalls of Sin formerly supplied matter for all the learning and eloquence of centuries of Divines, so nowadays encyclopædic science and journalistic emphasis are being applied to making our flesh creep

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with prophecies of Perils. There is Peril from black, brown, yellow races ; from Semites, Mongols, Latins (in "Nordic" countries), Teutons (in Latin countries), Celts all over Anglo-Saxondom, Jews throughout the globe ; Bolsheviks, Fascists and Junkers, International Communism and International Finance, Militarism which was put an end to by the War, besides our old friends Jesuits and Freemasons. There is Peril from the multiplication of Idiots and the multiplication of Supermen ; Peril from depopulation and Peril from overpopulation, from unsexed women and over-sexed women ; Peril from overmuch altruism, and Peril from insufficient altruism. Perils which I cannot even remember, but by whose side those of War, Pestilence and Famine are, of course, too familiar to be noticed. Indeed, it is characteristic of this latter-day apocalypse that none of the prophets of disaster prophesied the War and the Fruits of Victory, except, if I remember correctly, Mr. H. G. Wells, who, how-

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ever, once the War had been declared, enlisted at once for the Fleet Street Front and bid us unsheathe the Sword of Peace for the final extermination of Militarism. . . .

Therefore, it strikes me that in view of this multifold reincarnation of the spirit of prophecy in our Men of Science and of Letters, some increase of Intelligence may well be needed to steady our nerves and allow us to recognize the real dangers of which, heaven knows, there are plenty requiring to be faced with . . . well, the far-too-little Intelligence already at our disposal. For, possibly because it is not "creative" (and *creation* usually implies chaos and refuse-heaps), Intelligence is especially preservative and sheltering. It is the natural purifier and tidier-up where Genius and Stupidity, disrupting and corrupting by turns, have between them played the deuce with our poor mortal heritage. And in the face of the millionfold sacrifices of self and others which Ideals

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and Heroisms have once again presented to our foolish admiration, I would go so far as to add that Intelligence is often more humane than Sentiment, and, oftener still, more beneficent than what we call Virtue.

From the misapplications of our Science, the exaggerations and lunacies of our Genius, and the havoc wrought by our higher instincts, we therefore need to be saved, not by Reason, which is always too long in getting under weigh, but by Intelligence, active, alacritous and ubiquitous, afraid neither of being laughed at nor of laughing at others. . . . But even as I stammer out this old-fashioned demand for *Salvation*, the name of Proteus sounds suddenly in the ear of my spirit. How can I tell what Proteus may next be—perhaps already is—changing into? And after prating about Intelligence being one-half light-hearted scepticism and one-half steady confidence, am I going to join the mixed choir, ecstatic

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or growling, of prophesying optimists and pessimists?

But, though restrained by that thought of Proteus and his frequently inconsiderate metamorphoses, I should like to add a word on one question regarding the near future of Intelligence, but with the understanding that I do so not as a prophet of what may happen, so much as a witness of half a century's already accomplished changes. The question, or rather query, has doubtless occurred to some of my readers, and is as follows: Granted that Intelligence rids us of dangerous superstitions, and rids us, moreover, of the habit of superstition, which is a matter less of *what* than of *how* one believes; granted that along with lucidity Intelligence brings also intellectual equity, cleanliness and dignity; granted all this, may not such gains be paid for in disproportionate loss? And may not Intelligence itself constitute a danger? Has it not already begun despoiling life of many of the shelters built by

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the Ages with unknowing or inspired hands? Worse still: will it not replace with its narrow and wavering lucidity those dark unquestioning instincts and aspirations, lurking ever ready in the obscure organization and the mysterious formulæ inherited from our remotest ancestors?

To this I would answer that, so far as my observation tells me, the soul will always find some shape and some material wherein to build, or to restore, the shelters needed in its moments of weariness and sorrow, there to await the consolation which no creed seems to bring without the supreme aid of time. On the other hand, that the instinctive part of our nature, when it is truly instinctive, can surely be trusted to keep itself alive in the face of the (alas!) inevitably feeble imperatives of such new-comers as Reason and Intelligence. Moreover, that all the sciences dealing with man point to the fact that traditional commandments and, even more, physiologically trans-

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mitted tendencies, have constituted themselves as responses to changing environments and needs, so that their transformation may be expected as a result of the very movement of things which has produced them.

And, finally, I would add that, even if all this were doubtful, we must accept the risks which the coming of Intelligence may entail upon us, because (so at least appears evident to me) whatever sets-back and temporary overwheltings it may suffer in the future, Intelligence is of such nature that, once come, it must develop, or at least bide its time and revive in as yet unforeseeable manner. And Intelligence itself must prepare us to expect that every change may mean a loss, but likewise mean an opportunity. Perhaps it may even sometimes show us how the one can turn into the other ; for does not Intelligence keep an eye on Proteus ?

FINIS.

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